

Matthew Lesson 12

Matthew Chapter 12

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Memory verses for this week: *1 Pet 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

Introduction: In last week's lesson, we studied about Jesus going forth to preach and teach just like he had told the disciples to do. We then discussed how that John the Baptist was the greatest man ever to live according to Christ. At the end of the chapter, we discussed how there are two kinds of rest. One we receive when we are saved. The other we earn as we take the yoke of Christ upon us.

In chapter 12, we see opposition arising to Christ primarily from the Pharisees. What is evident in them is a critical spirit. The focal point of their opposition was Jesus' conduct on the Sabbath. The Lord touches upon five areas of teaching in the last portion of this chapter: (1) the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit; (2) the mouth reveals the heart; (3) the sign of Jonah; (4) warning to Israel of impending judgment; and (5) the basis of Jesus' spiritual family.

I. Jesus Declares Himself Lord of the Sabbath

Mat 12:1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

Mat 12:2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for allowing His disciple to pluck ears of grain to eat on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of breaking the Law of God. It should be noted that what the disciples broke was not the Law of God, but rather the *rabbinical tradition* regarding the Law.

Through the centuries after the Babylonian captivity, the rabbinical system had developed in Judaism. In time, the traditions of the rabbis (elders) came to be viewed as having equal authority to the Word of God. In practice, the Pharisees (which most rabbis were) considered the traditions to be more authoritative than the Law itself. Thus, they came to view their traditional commentaries as a part of the Law.

The Pharisees mentioned throughout this chapter were a sect within Judaism. They were the religious conservatives of their day and held to a literal understanding of the Scriptures. They likely were named after a son of Judah named *Phares* which means to be separated. An alternate view is that the name *Pharisees* derived from the Hebrew word *pharushim* which means 'interpreters' (of the Law). Indeed, the Pharisees took it upon themselves to interpret the Law. Their interpretations came to be known as the *traditions*.

Today, rabbinical traditions are collectively recorded in the Talmud. Jesus never censured the Pharisees for their basic theology, though He was harshly critical of their *traditions*. The Lord spoke to them repeatedly concerning their critical spirit, hardness of heart, and their lack of faith, mercy, and compassion. They were the true legalists. Their entire perspective was of keeping the Law and particularly all of the rabbinical traditions as *the way* to righteousness and God.

The Sabbath day was a day given for the complete rest of man. In the record of creation, God, who can not tire, set an example for us and rested on the seventh day. We are not like God, and need rest. Many today think they can work seven days a week, but it takes its toll.

Gen 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

Gen 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

Gen 2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Mat 12:3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

Mat 12:4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

Mat 12:5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

Jesus' response to this criticism was twofold. He reminded them how that David ate the shewbread at the Tabernacle when greatly hungered. Jesus turned the tables on the Pharisees by using the same phrase "not lawful" in regard to David.

Rabbinical tradition has long held that breaching the non-moral or non-ethical portions of the Law was permissible to prevent death, injury, or harm. That is precisely what David did in eating the shewbread. And that is what the disciples did on the Sabbath.

It should be noted that under the Levitical Law, itinerants could lawfully pluck grain to eat in transit. That was not the issue. Rather, Jesus thus turned the criticism of the Pharisees on its head by appealing to the very exceptions noted by the rabbis themselves. He reminded the Pharisees how that priests of the Temple routinely profaned the Sabbath day by their chores at the Temple. Among other things, this included kindling of fire for the sacrifices which they ate.

The Pharisees had so elevated the Sabbath in their thinking that someone doing anything *common* on the Sabbath was thought to be violation of the Law. Eating is one of the most common practices in life. Priests on duty at the Temple routinely ate on the Sabbath and in the Temple. In so doing, Jesus caught them in their own web of traditions.

The greater principle Jesus taught here is that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. The Pharisees had become so caught up in the minutiae and pettifogging of rabbinical embellishments of the Law that they had lost sight of the greater purpose of it. They couldn't see the forest for the trees.

Mat 12:6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

Mat 12:7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Mat 12:8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

Jesus points out that the priest offered two lambs for an offering on the Sabbath day, and they were not held to be breakers of the Sabbath. Jesus makes a good defense, and then says in verse 7, "But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple." The Temple embodied all that was most sacred in the life of the nation; yet Jesus declares that He is greater than all the worship, symbols, and laws of the house of God. He then declares in verse 8 that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus was, and still is, LORD OF ALL. All things were created by him, and without Him nothing was created.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God.

John 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Jesus shook up many' by informing them that He was greater than the Temple. His point likely is that if the priests at the Temple were allowed exceptions by the traditions of the rabbis, how much more the Messiah? The Jewish Temple was a vast, thirty-five- acre complex which was one of the architectural wonders of the world. The Jews were extremely proud of it, not only for its 'religious' significance but for its fame throughout the world.

For one to stand and say He was greater than the Temple to them was blasphemy.

For the second time in this gospel, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 (see also Matthew 9:13).

Hos 6:6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

What Jesus clearly taught is that the purpose of the Law was to be a blessing to God's people, not a burden. God is more interested in mercy than the minute details of the law. If these blind legalists really understood the law and its greater purpose, they would not have been so quick to criticize the disciples of Jesus.

It should be noted that eleven out of the twelve of Jesus' disciples were from Galilee and away from the legalistic center of Judaism at Jerusalem. They may not have even known this particular rule of the Pharisees. Or, they may have been aware of it and considered it absurd. Modern, less than orthodox Jews likewise consider the similar legalistic rules of the orthodox today as absurd.

In verse 8, Jesus noted another truth which likely infuriated His antagonists. He in fact is the Lord even of the Sabbath. The Pharisees likely were aware that He often referred to Himself as the Son of man. But as Creator of the Sabbath, He indeed was Lord thereof. All of this fuss, of course, solely rests upon the interpretation of the fourth commandment wherein God decreed among other things that on the Sabbath, "thou shalt not do any work" (Exodus 20:10).

The problem was all the regulations and interpretations which the rabbis had added to interpret what was work on the Sabbath. It was this legalistic minutia at which Jesus bristled. They had in fact added to the Word of God.

II. The Healing of the Withered Hand on the Sabbath

Mat 12:9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

Mat 12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And

they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

Jesus entered the Synagogue and set an example for us that we need to worship God on the appointed day. People want so much sometimes to not worship God that they may push the ox into the ditch so they can stay away from church and not worship. The divinely appointed day for worship should be honored. For Christians, our day is Sunday and we should rest and worship the Lord on that day. The only valid reasons for missing services on Sunday is to do works of necessity and to provide mercy. (Helping the sick or infirmed.) The Pharisees watch to see if they can find fault in Christ and see if he might break the Sabbath law.

Jesus went to the synagogue on that Sabbath. It is not mentioned which town or synagogue into which He entered. However, the last geographical marker noted was at Capernaum in 11:23. This likely was still where Jesus was. The synagogue at Capernaum was an ornate, expensive edifice—the big ‘downtown’ synagogue of the upper class.

It also is noted as “their synagogue” implying it was whence the critical Pharisees (noted in verse 2) attended. As it so happened, present was “a man which had *his* hand withered.” Jesus knew that before He entered in. The critical, hardhearted Pharisees knew it also.

The Pharisees asked Him, *“Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?”* Their interest was neither curiosity nor theological. Their interest was “that they might accuse him.” They hoped Jesus would heal the man, not because of any concern for him. Rather, they were hoping to have further ammunition to use against Jesus.

Mat 12:11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

Mat 12:12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

Mat 12:13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Jesus uses good logic in his question. If it is allowed for a man to pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, surely it would be legal to heal a man on the Sabbath. Man is certainly more important in the eyes of God than animals. Our society has lost track of that. It is illegal to destroy an eagle’s egg, but you can legally kill a baby by abortion. God help our nation to get our priorities straightened out.

Jesus spoke an allegory using sheep. The Lord reminded them that not a one of them would hesitate to rescue their own livestock on the Sabbath day. He then asked a simple yet powerful question. *"How much then is a man better than a sheep?"* The answer to that is apparent. Jesus continued, *"Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days."*

It certainly was good to do such a compassionate act. Moreover, the rabbis themselves had a rule that it was 'lawful' to save a life or to save one from injury on the Sabbath. The Pharisees knew that. They had no response to such incisive wisdom.

Should there be any unanswered question to the 'legality' of what Jesus had done, He merely instructed the man to stretch forth His hand. Jesus otherwise did nothing. The man's hand miraculously was restored before their eyes.

J. Vernon McGee questioned whether the Pharisees might have put the man with the withered hand where Christ would come upon him. I don't know for sure, but I know for sure one thing. Jesus healed the man.

Was this man with the withered hand "planted" there, deliberately, by the Pharisees to trap Jesus into healing him? If so, then there are two important admissions on the part of the enemies of Jesus:

1. They admitted He had power to heal the sick. As we have seen, the enemies of Jesus never questioned His ability to perform miracles. You have to be two thousand years away from it and working in a musty library on a master's or doctor's degree before you can question His miracles. The Pharisees freely admitted that He had power to heal the sick. This is why they planted this man with the withered hand.

2. They acknowledged that when a helpless man was placed in His pathway, He was moved by compassion to heal him, even on the Sabbath day. What an admission!

Their question about the legality of healing on the Sabbath day was designed to trap Him. But Jesus actually trapped His enemies. They conceded that a sheep should be rescued on the Sabbath day—in fact, the Mosaic Law made allowances for that.

How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days [Matt. 12:12].

This is the crux of the whole matter: Should He do good on the Sabbath day? Regardless of their answer—

Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other [Matt. 12:13].

Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath day. Did He break the Law? What is your answer? My answer is that He did *not* break the Law.

Mat 12:14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

As soon as the Pharisees see the man healed, they don't rejoice like they should. Rather they go out and plot how they might destroy Christ. The true colors of the Pharisees bled through. They were not interested in anyone but themselves. After Jesus challenged their authority, they began to plan His destruction. Accordingly, the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

The word translated as council (sumboulion *symbolion*) is of significance. Though a Greek word, it had strong Latin connotations. It was not used to speak of Jewish meetings, but rather Roman. Strongly hinted is that the Herodians were invited to this plotting session.

At this relatively, early point in Jesus' ministry, His enemies were already plotting His destruction, even in Galilee. Even those who otherwise were political adversaries were now forming coalitions against Jesus.

III. Jesus And The Multitudes

Mat 12:15 But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

Jesus evidently left Capernaum and went elsewhere. As He went, He continued to heal folks. It was apparently still the Sabbath Day. He was not in the least deterred by the threats of His enemies.

What the Pharisees were planning was not a surprise to Christ. He knew all things, and could perceive even their thoughts. God knows us that way. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and knows what we will and will not do. If we are good, we will do good from the heart. If evil, we will do evil.

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart

bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

Luke 6:46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Jesus withdraws from the Pharisees and a great multitude followed him. But when he taught serious doctrine, many turned back. Multitudes will come if you do good for them and feed them. But the true worshippers will stay even when things are tough and the teachings condemn the heart. If our hearts are right with God, we will want to bring our lives back inline with God's commandments and laws.

John 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

John 6:54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

John 6:56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

John 6:57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

John 6:58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

John 6:59 These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

John 6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

John 6:61 When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?

John 6:62 What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

John 6:64 But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

John 6:65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

John 6:66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

John 6:67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

Mat 12:16 And charged them that they should not make him known:

Mat 12:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

Mat 12:18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles.

Mat 12:19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

Mat 12:20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

Mat 12:21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Jesus healed the multitudes, and not the Jews only. Christ came first to the house of Israel, but he also came for the Gentiles. I am so thankful that he did. Matthew records here how Christ withdrawing was a fulfillment of scripture from Isaiah. Christ was one who was meek and gentle. He was always one who did not strive nor cry aloud. And there will come a time when he will appear in triumph and victory. It says in verse 21 that in Christ's name the Gentiles do trust. There is not another name under heaven by which we can be saved than Jesus Christ.

Acts 4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

Acts 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

The Lord charged those that were healed and the witnesses as well that they should not make him known. As in many Jewish communities, Jesus sought to discourage those recipients of His miracles from publishing the news thereof. The time for the official offer and announcement of Him as Messiah had not arrived. Though He clearly was laying the groundwork for that announcement, it was not as yet God's time for Him to be publicly revealed.

The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to comment that this was in fact a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1-4. The greater import of this quotation is that it clearly was Messianic, as any Jew would know. Furthermore, it clearly was applied to Jesus.

The implication is that God was pleased with Jesus' ministry even if the religious officials of that day was not. There is another clear hint that the work of Christ was pointing toward the Gentiles inasmuch as the formal, Jewish establishment was rejecting Him. Isaiah foretold how the Messiah would be meek and lowly of spirit—*'He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets'* (Isaiah 42:1-4).

Isa 42:1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

Isa 42:2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

Isa 42:3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

Isa 42:4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

This, Jesus clearly fulfilled. A bruised reed was one already bent. The thought likely is how the Messiah, when He came, would not harshly break what already was bruised. Smoking flax likely referred to a smoldering wick in a lamp struggling to keep its flame alive. Again, the thought likely is that when the Messiah came, He would not abruptly, and with no concern, snub out a flickering lamp.

The greater thought likely is how that the Messiah would be gentle and compassionate to the needs of those around Him. As Jesus had gone about healing (even on the Sabbath), He had demonstrated such a gentle, kind spirit and so fulfilled what Isaiah had prophesied centuries before.

Moreover, Isaiah clearly foretold that "in his name shall the Gentiles trust." That has come true in the church. Again, Jesus strongly hinted at how the gospel would, before long, go to the gentiles. Paul would quote this same passage in this regard in Romans 15:12.

IV. The Pharisees Oppose Christ's Power to Cast Out Demons

Mat 12:22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

Mat 12:23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

Mat 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

Jesus was always out helping people. He had the heart of a pastor and a shepherd. He wanted to make people well and for them to have the best possible life. Jesus healed the blind and dumb. The people were amazed and asked, "Is not this the son of David?" Yes, he was from the line of David, but He was so much more. This was the very begotten Son of God. The attitude of the Pharisees was evil. They don't give God credit but claim that Jesus cast out the devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.

Jesus again performed a notable miracle in healing one who by Satan was blind and dumb. Significant is the implication that serious, physical defects can be caused by the devil. The common people recalled that Jesus was the son of David implying He was the Messiah. But when the Pharisees heard that, they claimed He was acting under satanic power. Not only did they blaspheme Jesus by implying His work was of the devil, they did it in the most base and distasteful way they could find.

Mat 12:25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

Mat 12:26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

Mat 12:27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

Notice that Jesus knowing their thoughts clearly indicated His Deity. Jesus simply reminded them that Satan does not attack his own kingdom. He knows better. If demons were cast out by the aid of Satan, then Satan was fighting against his own servants and his kingdom would be divided against itself.

Continuing, Jesus asked, *"And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges."*

The Jews practiced a form of 'exorcism.' Jesus turned the tables on them and asked in effect, 'if I cast out demons by Satan, then how do you guys do it?' Let your children be the judge.

Mat 12:28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Mat 12:29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

Mat 12:30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

Jesus knew the very thoughts of the Pharisees... and he answers them. Their argument was foolish. Why would Satan cast out his own demons. To do so would divide his own kingdom and it would not stand. Jesus cast out demons just like he did all things.. but the power and Spirit of God. Verse 30 points out that anyone who is not with Christ is against Him. There is no middle ground.

The other alternative is that He was acting by the power of God's Spirit. Jesus reminded them if that be the case (and it was); therefore the long awaited kingdom of God was at hand. Sadly, they rejected Him and in so doing the kingdom they sought.

Jesus used a simple analogy in verse 29. One cannot enter into a powerful man's house and rob it without first subduing the owner. Jesus was in fact breaking into Satan's kingdom and was in the process of subduing it.

Our Lord thus noted, *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."*

We are either with Him in the battle or we are not. There is no middle ground.

V. The Unpardonable Sin

Mat 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

Mat 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

The unforgivable sin, also known as the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, is spoken of here. The context holds the key to understanding this precept. The Pharisees in rejecting Christ's miracles had also spurned the Holy Ghost by whose power He worked. They had ascribed the work of God to the devil. It was the Holy Spirit working through Jesus by which He performed His miracles during His earthly ministry.

The doctrine of the Trinity must be understood in order to correctly understand the implications found in this text. A corollary passage is Hebrews 6:4- 6. It is a dangerous thing to repeatedly reject the work of the Holy Spirit as He would draw one to Christ. We simply can not sin against the Holy Ghost. God will forgive us of all other sins when we repent and show faith towards God.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

This unforgivable sin speaks of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. This is the one unforgivable sin. If you are under the sound of the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit comes and draws you, and you refuse again and again, you have no choice but to face God and pay for your sins in the flames of Hell. But if when we are drawn, we repent and turn to Christ, all manner of sin will be forgiven us. If we reject, this sin will not be forgiven in this world nor the world to come.

VI. The Warning About Idle Words

Mat 12:33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

Mat 12:34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Jesus used the illustration of fruit bearing trees to illustrate the character of the trees themselves. A wild, crab apple tree produces fruit that is so bitter one will involuntarily spit it out. The source of the bitter (corrupt) fruit is the tree itself. A domesticated, cultivated apple tree, rather, will produce sweet desirable fruit. The source thereof is the very nature of the tree from which the fruit came. Likewise, the old spiritual nature within each of us bears bitter fruit, whereas the new spiritual nature bears good fruit. Our lives reveal the character of the spiritual nature operating within.

The solution to a harvest of bitter fruit is in changing the tree itself. In the realm of agriculture, that can be accomplished only by grafting cultivated domesticated stock onto the root stock of a wild tree. It in effect gives the tree a new nature. It is a simple, yet, effective illustration of the new birth and its implications. That is why Jesus said, *“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt.”*

Only when a man has been born again can there be altogether good fruit brought forth from his life. Jesus thus switched metaphors. Moving from the analogy of bitter fruit coming from wild trees. He spoke of the poison which comes from venomous snakes. Jesus likened the Pharisees (to whom He undoubtedly referred) as a “generation of vipers.” From the mouth of such creatures comes its characteristic venom. He in doing so tied both analogies together by noting, *“for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”*

What comes out of the mouth indicates the spiritual nature of the heart from whence it comes. Good words come from a good heart. Bitter and venomous statements likewise come from the heart. The distinction reveals the spiritual nature from whence things are spoken. One walking in the new, spiritual nature will utter good words. One walking in the flesh will utter the foul and venomous words characteristic thereof. Jesus made it clear that it is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth overflows.

Galatians 5 speaks of walking in the Spirit as a habit of life. In so doing, it becomes the abundance of one's heart and one speaks accordingly. Conversely, as one continues to walk in the flesh, that ugly nature forms the abundance of the heart and one speaks accordingly. See notes for Galatians 5:13-26.

When you go out in a fruit orchard, some people can look at a tree and by the size and leaf pattern, they can tell you what kind of tree it is. But all of us, can go out and look at the fruit, and be sure of the kind it is. Apple trees do not produce peaches, or peach trees put forth figs. We are known for either being good or evil, and from the abundance of our heart our mouth speaks. If we are truly evil, it won't be long until the bad flows out. We are to let our speech be simple and clear, yea meaning yea, and nay meaning nay.

Mat 5:37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

The third chapter of James has a lot to say about the tongue.

James 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

James 3:2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

James 3:3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

James 3:4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

James 3:7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

James 3:8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

James 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Adam Clarke in his commentary said this about how our words will condemn us or prove us.

Wicked words and sinful actions may be considered as the overflowings of a heart that is more than full of the spirit of wickedness; and holy words and righteous deeds may be considered as the overflowings of a heart that is filled with the Holy Spirit, and running over with love to God and man.

Mat 12:35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Mat 12:36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

Mat 12:37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Jesus elaborates further on this principle. What comes forth from our lips emanates from the heart. Jesus noted both good and evil men and the treasury of the heart. The thought likely is that place in the center of our being wherein we guard our deepest thoughts. From that treasury utters forth from the mouth the abundance of what is in the heart. If one's heart is godly and spiritual, that which comes forth will reflect that. If one is carnal, evil, and worldly, the same will overflow as well.

As in verse 33, our mouth reveals which spiritual character is operating in our lives: the old or the new. Moreover, every idle word we speak will be accounted of in the day of judgment. How careful we must therefore be with our words.

Rom 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

Rom 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Inasmuch as words reveal the true character of the heart, what men have said in their lives will be used as testimony against them in that day. Each incident, in which men have cursed by God's name, will be used as testimony against their lost and wicked condition at the Great White Throne Judgment.

In concluding this section, Jesus said, *"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."*

The words of one's mouth will bear witness either for him or against him at the judgment someday. Once again, the clear warning of how we use our tongue is brought to bear by our Lord. Talk may be cheap, but it also carries long-lasting and heavy responsibility. Moreover, it reflects the spiritual condition of the heart whence it comes.

Jesus teaches that we need to make the tree good, or it will be a corrupt tree. Jesus doesn't mince words... he calls them a 'generation of vipers'. Those who claim we should never preach on the consequences of sin or of Hell need to look at Jesus' teachings. He taught more about Hell and the consequences of sin than he did of the glory of Heaven. Few there be that find that narrow path the bible says. Jesus is a narrow way, and the only way to the Father. Muhammad won't help you, nor will Buddha. There is not one false god out there that can help on the day you die. Either you will come through Jesus Christ, or you won't come into heaven. We are warned that all of our idle words will come into account one day in judgment. My grandpa used to say if you can't say something good about folks, then just don't say anything at all. Except to warn that person, that is probably good advice. There is a time to speak, but there is also a time to keep silent. God help us to discern.

There is a day of judgment coming for every man and woman. Those who know Christ will stand before Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ to determine our rewards. Those who are lost will stand before God at the Great White Throne Judgment.

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

1 Cor 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

1 Cor 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

1 Cor 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

1 Cor 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Rev 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no

place for them.

Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Rev 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

Rev 20:14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

VII. The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

Mat 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

Mat 12:39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

Mat 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Matthew now shifts to another incident in our Lord's ministry. Though the time is not noted, it may be that it followed directly after the preceding events as the context seems to suggest. Unbelievers down through the ages have sought for some sort of sign as evidence of God's reality. In so doing, they reveal their unbelief and spiritual blindness to God's revelation through His Word and creation.

Joh 2:18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

The Jews (who ironically had witnessed more of God's working through them than any other people) seemingly were the worst offenders in this regard. In the preceding context, Jesus had wrought a miracle of healing the blind and dumb man. Apparently the same scribes and Pharisees wanted to see more. There may have been carnal curiosity to be entertained. There certainly was unbelief.

Jesus' reply was that the only sign they would be given was that of Jonah. Jesus referred to His resurrection. That is the only major sign He has given to this age. The reference to Jonah being in the whale's belly three days and three nights is likewise ascribed to Christ's burial. Simple math will indicate that Jesus was

crucified earlier than the traditional Good Friday. Counting back three days and three nights from Sunday morning places the actual time of the crucifixion on Wednesday. The Bible nowhere mentions Friday as the day.

The greater point however, is that one definitive sign Jesus would give to that generation (and to this day) was His resurrection. That is the singular sign which generation, always seeking signs from God, as an “evil and adulterous generation.” There is an instructive correlation revealed between unbelief and adultery. Though outwardly pious and self righteous, Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees adulterous. They brought accusations upon Jesus’ for what they thought was a terrible breach of the Sabbath by healing thereon. Yet, they apparently were guilty as adulterers.

Some question whether Jonah was in a big fish or a whale. Jesus settles that argument in verse 40. Jesus tells them how that no sign would come to an evil and adulterous generation but from what the prophets have already given. Jesus promised to come and die for our sins, and after three days and three nights, he would rise out of the grave. He did just what he said he would do.

The Scribes and Pharisees were the religious leaders of that day. As we mentioned last week, they were always questioning Jesus as to who he was and his authority. It was amazing that they would ask for a sign, as so many miracles had already been done to prove Christ was who He claimed to be. But they still did not believe. Jesus calls them an ‘evil and adulterous generation.’ If they were in that day, how much more so do we live in a generation that has turned from God. Jesus says that there would be no sign given but the sign of the prophet Jonah. In verse 40, Jesus says that he would be three days and three nights in the earth (72 hours) like Jonah was in the belly of the whale. We have a leading denomination that teaches that Jesus was crucified on Friday, and they call it Good Friday. But that is not what the bible teaches. No matter how you count the days and nights, you can’t get three days and three nights from Friday to Sunday. According to the bible, Jesus was crucified somewhere around 9 am on Wednesday morning and stayed on the cross until around 3pm. The Jewish day began at sundown. Sometime around sundown on Wednesday, Jesus was placed in the tomb. Wednesday night, Thursday night, and Friday night make up the three nights. Where the confusion comes in is when we read that they had to take the body down off the cross because the next day was the Sabbath. However, if you read that verse carefully, it says that Thursday was a HIGH SABBATH DAY.

John 19:31 The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

High Sabbath Days were on Thursday, and many confuse this with the Saturday Sabbath. Jesus was in the tomb Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The new week began around 6pm on Saturday, and we find this was the time the women came to the tomb, at the dawning of a new week. We think of dawn as being when the sun arises, but that is not the meaning of the word here. In the American Heritage Dictionary, the secondary meaning of dawn is stated as “a first appearance” or ‘beginning’.

Mat 28:1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

John 20:1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

Mat 12:41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Mat 12:42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Jesus again brings to mind ancient cities which faced God’s judgment, in this case, Nineveh. Jesus again condemned Israel for its unbelief and hardness of heart. Nineveh (a gentile city) repented at the preaching of Jonah, though covenant-Israel would not repent at the preaching of Jesus.

Clear is the continued implication of the need for Israel to repent. Nineveh, a pagan, gentile city, did so when Jonah preached. Israel only hardened their hearts and demanded more signs when Jesus preached. Clearly implied is the reality of the resurrection. Jesus said the men of Nineveh would rise in judgment against Israel, condemning it. That bespeaks their resurrection as well as the condemnation by them of Israel in that day.

Further implied is that the Ninevites would prevail in the judgment whereas Israel, at least of that day, would not. Jesus likely infuriated the Pharisees by informing them that One greater than the prophet Jonah was in their midst.

This is the second comparison in this chapter to Jesus being greater than that esteemed by the Jews. The first was the Temple in 12:6.

In verse 42, the queen of Sheba (a gentile ruler), who came from Ethiopia, will likewise condemn unbelieving Israel at the judgment following the resurrection. She came with an open heart to hear the godly wisdom of Solomon and believed. See I Kings 10:1. *"Yet, One greater than Solomon was in their midst."*

For the third time in this chapter, Jesus likened Himself to being greater than the heroes of Jewish history. He compared Himself to being greater than Solomon, the wisest and wealthiest king to ever grace the throne of Israel. The significance of these comparisons likely did not escape His opposition though they refused to acknowledge it.

Whether they liked it or not, Jesus had described Himself as greater than the Temple, Jonah, and king Solomon. The men of Nineveh would condemn this generation in the judgment because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. Jonah only preached an 8 word message, but that was enough. And now, a greater than Jonah was in their presence.

Jonah 3:4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

J. Vernon McGee said this about the people of Nineveh.

Who would have thought that in the wicked city of Nineveh people would listen to the Word of God and to a man who said, "I'm back from the dead"? By the way, that is the same message we have. We have a message concerning a man who came back from the dead. Paul writes, "... if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:24–25).

Jonah entered the city with a message of judgment: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." I think Jonah gave that message with relish—he didn't like Ninevites!

In verse 42, it says the queen of Sheba will condemn this generation because she came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and now a greater than Solomon was present.

VIII. Warning of Useless Self Reformation

Mat 12:43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

Mat 12:44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

Mat 12:45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

Jesus continued to reveal Himself to contemporary Israel. This parable may be a reference to the worthlessness of self-righteousness which the Pharisees routinely practiced. Or, more likely (in its context), it may be a reference to collective Israel in its self-righteousness facing even worse judgment ahead. And indeed, they did. In any event, the analogy Jesus used sheds light on the realm of demonic activity and how they operate. They desire a human body. Moreover, more than one can and often does occupy one body.

In the case which Jesus described, the demon left and returned to find that the poor individual had in turn gotten his life back in order. Therefore, the demon brought seven other of his comrades to reoccupy the hapless individual. Jesus' point very well may have been that though Israel of that day outwardly endeavored to present the appearance of being righteous, they were even worse than before.

The key phrase of this parable is found in the final phrases, *“and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”*

Though Israel had seemingly cleaned up its 'act' in ridding itself of idolatry, their spiritual condition was indeed worse than before. Even as a group of demons returning to the described man was worse, so was it with Israel. Moreover, they would suffer the chastisement to come as God judged them for their rejection of Christ in the decades to follow.

You can clean up the outside of the cup, but it won't do the inside any good. We have to clean from the inside out. In II Peter, it teaches that one who cleans up the outside and is not born again is likened to a sow returning to the mud or a dog returning to his vomit.

2 Pet 2:17 These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.

2 Pet 2:18 For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

2 Pet 2:19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

2 Pet 2:20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them

than the beginning.

2 Pet 2:21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

2 Pet 2:22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

If the dog or hog had received the true sheep nature, they would have changed. Their desires would be different and they would want to live like a sheep. If you sin and are not deeply condemned by the Holy Spirit, you had better check your salvation.

Mat 12:46 While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

Mat 12:47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

Mat 12:48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

Mat 12:49 And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

Mat 12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

At first reading, the preceding paragraph would seem to indicate that Jesus was discourteous to His own immediate family. However, the lesson He intended was in the greater sphere of events. His true spiritual family were those who are obedient to God's will. Those who are obedient and submissive to His Lordship are those closest to Him. Obedience to Christ is that which demonstrates true love for Him.

Joh 15:21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

Joh 15:22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

Joh 15:23 He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

Joh 15:24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

Ironically, most of Jesus' siblings did not believe in Him during His earthy ministry. Jesus knew that as did they. Again, the overtone is of Israel's spiritual rejection of Him as did some of His own family. By contrast, many a gentile in years to come would not only believe on Him but be obedient to the Father altogether. It was these who would become His true spiritual family. That principle remains to this day.

The disciples tell Christ that his mother and brothers were near and wanted to speak to him. Jesus was so into the work of the Lord, that he proclaims that those that truly followed him were his true brethren. Those who will do the will of the Father are Christ's brother, sister, and mother. The lesson of putting Christ and his work first is what is being stressed here. Jesus needs to be first in your life. Families are wonderful, but we are not to let family relationships get between us and Christ.

One more good comment from J. Vernon McGee.

The Lord is saying that the strongest relationship today is the relationship between Christ and a believer. Friend, if you are a child of God and you have unsaved family members, you are closer to Jesus Christ than you are to your own kin, including the mother that bore you. You are more closely related to other believers than you are to unsaved members of your family. This is tremendous! He is talking about a new relationship.

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother [Matt. 12:50].

And what is the will of the Father? That you hear the Lord Jesus Christ, that you accept Him and trust Him.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be

blessed.